



Ten Subjects of Srimad-Bhagavatam.

The Bhagavata Purana, commonly referred to as the Srimad-Bhagavatam, is considered the ripened fruit of all Vedic knowledge. Sri Vyasa Muni, the compiler of the Vedic texts, advises us as follows:

nigama-kalpa-taror galitam phalam
shuka-mukhad amrita-drava-samyutam
nigama bhagavatam rasam alayam
muhur aho rasika bhuvi bhavukah

"O expert and thoughtful men, relish Srimad-Bhagavatam, the mature fruit of the desire tree of Vedic literatures. It emanated from the lips of Sri Shuka Muni. Therefore this fruit has become even more tasteful, although its nectarean juice was already relishable for all, including liberated souls."

Srimad-Bhagavatam is the galitam phalam, or ripened fruit, of all Vedic knowledge. It is exactly like amrita, for by hearing its recitation we can cross beyond birth and death.

The Srimad-Bhagavatam describes the various incarnations of Lord Hari, and in the process of these descriptions ten important subject matters are explained, namely sarga (the elemental creation), visarga (the secondary creation), sthanam (the planetary systems), poshanam (protection by the Lord), utayah (the creative impetus), manvantara (the periods of Manu), isha-anukatha (the science of God), nirodha (dissolution), mukti (liberation), and ashraya (the supreme shelter).

The reciters of Srimad-Bhagavatam have utilized three methods to explain these ten subjects, namely by Vedic reference (shrutena), by direct explanation (arthena), and by summary explanations given by the great sages (anjasa).

The following is a brief explanation of each of these ten subjects.

1) Sarga - the elemental creation

Sarga is defined as follows:

bhuta-matrendriya-dhiyam
janma sarga udahritah

"The elemental creation of sixteen principles of matter - namely the five gross elements (pancha-bhutas), the five objects of sense perception (tan-matras), the five knowledge acquiring senses (jnanendriyas) and the mind - is known as sarga."

The five gross elements (pancha-bhutas) are earth, water, fire, air and ether; the five objects of sensual perception (tan-matras) are sound, form, taste, smell, and touch; and the five knowledge acquiring senses (jnanendriyas) are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin. Together with the mind, these sixteen principles are created by the first purusha incarnation, Maha-Vishnu. Within these sixteen principles eight other principles exist subtly, making there a total of twenty-four principles of material existence.

2) Visarga - the secondary creation

Visarga is defined as follows:

brahmano guna-vaishamyad
visargah paurushah smritah

"The secondary creation by Brahma carried out through the interaction of the three modes of nature is known as visarga."

By manipulating the sixteen original principles of material existence and by the interaction of the three modes of material nature (sattva, rajas and tamas), Lord Brahma carries out a subsequent creation, more properly described as an assembling of universal ingredients.

3) Sthanam - the planetary systems

Sthanam is defined as follows:

sthitir vaikuntha-vijayah

"The true situation (sthanam) is the realm of Vaikuntha."

The entire creation by the Lord is to enable the conditioned souls to satisfy their material desire to lord over the material energy. As such, according to their desires, the Lord creates a suitable situation (sthanam) for them to dwell in. Within the universe, these situations can be divided into fourteen main categories, known technically as bhuvanas, or planetary systems, and 8,400,000 sub-categories, commonly known as species of life. From the topmost sthanam of Brahma-loka (the abode of Lord Brahma) down to the lowest sthanam of Patala-loka, all situations are destructible. In every situation the conditioned living entity is conquered by birth and death. Only by attaining to our eternal constitutional situation in the spiritual realm of Vaikuntha can we conquer the birth and death of this material world. Thus the true sthanam of the living entity is the realm of Vaikuntha. All other temporary situations within this material world cause one to become a victim of material suffering, simply shifting from one situation to the next.

4) Poshanam - protection by the Lord

Poshanam is defined as follows:

poshanam tad anugrahaḥ

"Protection (poshanam) is the causeless mercy of the Lord."

Poshanam can be defined in two ways according to the mentality of the living entity. For the conditioned souls, poshanam refers to material maintenance. It is the Lord who fulfills the desires of all living entities:

nityo nityanam chetanash chetananam
eko bahunam yo vidadhati kaman

"The supreme eternal among all eternal, the supremely conscious among all the conscious living entities - it is that supreme one among the many who fulfills the desires of all."

For the devotees of the Lord, poshanam refers to the Lord's causeless mercy and protection. Protection from hunger is the lowest form of protection, which the Lord offers to the conditioned living entities. For the devotees, the Lord's protection is protection from the illusion of maya. The Lord gives the devotee the strength to always remember Him and engage in His devotional service.

5) Utayah - the creative impetus

Utayah is defined as follows:

utayah karma-vasanaḥ

"The impetus for activity (utayah) is the desire for fruitive work."

The conditioned soul forgets that the Lord is his eternal protector and maintainer, and thus an impetus for fruitive activity is manifested for one's self maintenance. This desire for fruitive activity is the driving force behind all work within this material world. The karma-vasanas are the accumulated residue of one's previous activities. Every material activity we perform creates a residual impression within our consciousness, which is carried with us life after life. The sum total of these impressions form our creative impetus to work.

The true impetus of the living entity should be to go back to Godhead, to the supreme abode of Vaikuntha, and activities performed in that direction form the right path of work.

6) Manvantara - the change of Manus

Manvantara is defined as follows:

manvantarāni śad-dharma

"The reign of the Manus (manvantaras) are for establishing the eternal religious principles."

Manu is the father of mankind, the progenitor, empowered to guide the human race towards self-realization. Manu provides revealed scriptures to mankind which regulate their activities in a manner that will be for their eternal welfare. When the living entities accept such a regulated path, the Lord provides them with all protection by which they may attain their constitutional situation in Vaikuntha. Thus the desire to go back to Godhead and regulated activities performed to achieve that goal form the proper path of action.

7) Isha-anukatha - the science of God

Isha-anukatha is defined as follows:

avataranucharitam
haresh chasyanuvartinam
pumsam isha-kathah prokta
nanakhyanopabrimhitah

"The science of God (isha-anukatha) describes the incarnations of the Personality of Godhead and His different activities together with the activities of His great devotees."

The entire material creation is for the ultimate purpose of the living entities' salvation. When the conditioned living entities utilize the creation for secondary purposes, such as material fruitive activity, the Lord incarnates to reclaim these forgetful souls. The Lord directly delivers living entities by His divine appearance as well as by its recorded history. The Supreme Lord is so potent that simply by hearing about His transcendental activities in His various incarnations one becomes free from material bondage. Thus the topics of the Lord and His devotees, which constitute the science of God, should be given respectful aural reception.

8) Nirodha - the dissolution

Nirodha is defined as follows:

nirodho 'syanushayanam
atmanah saha shaktibhih

"The merging of the living entity, along with his conditioned living tendency, with the mystic lying down of the Maha-Vishnu is called the winding up of the cosmic manifestation, or nirodha."

As we have briefly mentioned before, the entire material creation offers two facilities to the conditioned living entities. The living entities may either utilize it to fulfill their desire to lord it over material nature, or they may utilize it to go back to Godhead, the spiritual abode of Vaikuntha. For the living entities who take advantage of the science of God as propagated by the Manus, and who develop a desire to act in such a regulated manner, the Lord provides them full protection from the material energy and resituates them in their proper situation in Vaikuntha. For the other living entities, who choose to disregard the science of God, the Lord gives them an interim period of relief at the time of dissolution. This temporary period of relief is technically called nirodha, or the winding up of the cosmic manifestation. All

the living entities along with their conditional tendencies (vasanas) merge into the body of Maha-Vishnu to await another creation and another opportunity to take up the science of God. Though the physical bodies are given up at this time, the subtle bodies (sukshma-sariras) remain with the living entities along with their latent desires. This is indicated by the words atmanah saha shaktibhih.

9) Mukti - liberation

Mukti is defined as follows:

muktir hitvanyatha rupam
sva-rupena vyavasthitih

"Liberation (mukti) is the permanent situation of the form of the living entity after he gives up the changeable gross and subtle material bodies."

Those living entities who develop a desire to act for their ultimate welfare regulate their life according to the instructions of the Manus. Such living entities receive the mercy and protection of the Lord in the form of His divine activities and incarnations, either personally or in its literary form as the science of God. By hearing the narrations of the Lord's activities these living entities are able to give up all external identification with the principles of material existence and its interaction. Such purified living entities develop their original spiritual bodies and are resituated in their constitutional position in Vaikuntha, the spiritual abode of the Lord. This is technically known as mukti or liberation. The words hitvanyatha rupam indicate that these living entities have become completely free from all material coverings including the sukshma-sarira and related vasanas. The word vyavasthitih indicates the real and eternal sthanam of the living entity - sthitir vaikuntha vijayah.

10) Ashraya - the supreme shelter

Ashraya is defined in the following three verses:

abhasash ca nirodhash ca
yato 'sty adhyavasiyate
sa ashrayah param brahma
paramatmeti shabdyate

"The supreme one who is celebrated as the Supreme Being or the Supreme Soul is the supreme source of the cosmic manifestation as well as its reservoir and winding up. Thus He is the supreme shelter, the Absolute Truth."

yo 'dhyatmiko 'yam purushah
so 'sav evadhidaivikah
yas tatrobhaya-vicchedah
purusho hy adhibhautikah
ekam ekatarabhava
yada nopalabhamahe
tritayam tatra yo veda

sa atma svashrayashrayah

"The individual person possessing different instruments of senses is called the adhyatmic person, and the individual controlling deity of the senses is called adhidaivic. The embodiment seen on the eyeballs is called the adhibhautic person. All three of the above mentioned stages of different living entities are interdependent. In the absence of one, another is not understood. But the Supreme Being who sees every one of them as the shelter of the shelter is independent of all, and therefore He is the supreme shelter."

The Srimad Bhagavata Purana begins with the Vedanta statement "janmady asya yatah" to bring to our attention the supreme source and shelter of all existence - the ashraya-tattva. In order to explain the transcendence of the ashraya the other nine subjects have been explained.

In all of existence there are factually only two divisions, namely the dependent (para-tantra) and the independent (sva-tantra). The independent (svarat) refers only to that Supreme Lord invoked in the beginning of Srimad-Bhagavatam by the words "om namo bhagavate vasudevaya". Sri Vyasa Muni begins by first offering his obeisances to Bhagavan Sri Krishna (Vasudeva) and then identifies Him as the absolute and independent shelter of everything - janmadyasya yatah svarat satyam param dhimahi. The transcendental Sri Krishna is that tenth subject of Srimad-Bhagavatam, and in order to properly describe Him, Sri Vyasa Muni has explained the other nine subject matters.

Studied together, these ten subject matters fully establish the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Bhagavan Sri Krishna, as the transcendental Absolute Truth. The Vedanta Sutas begin by instructing us to inquire into the nature of the Absolute Truth - athato brahma jijjnasa. This Srimad-Bhagavatam is the perfect companion to that inquiry, as it is the natural commentary to the Vedanta Sutas.

Both the Vedanta Sutas and the Srimad-Bhagavatam begin from the point of understanding the ultimate source of everything. Sri Vyasa Muni, the author of these two texts, begins both with the same verse: janmady asya yatah, "From whom everything emanates." But in the Srimad Bhagavatam he expands and elaborates on this very important philosophical subject in great detail:

janmady asya yatah anvayad itaratas carthesv abhijnah svarat
tene brahma hrda ya adi-kavaye muhyanti yat surayah
tejo-vari-mrdam yatha vinimayo yatra tri-sargo 'mrta
dhamna svena sada nirasta-kuhakam satyam param dhimahi

"I meditate upon Lord Sri Krishna because He is the Absolute Truth and the primeval cause of all causes of creation, sustenance and destruction on the manifested universes. He is directly and indirectly conscious of all manifestations and He is independent because there is no other cause beyond Him. It is He only who first the Vedic knowledge unto the heart of Brahmaji, the original living being. By Him even the great sages and demigods are placed into illusion, as one is bewildered by the illusory representations of water seen in fire, or land seen on water. Only because of Him do the material universes, temporarily manifested by the reactions of the three modes of nature, appear factual, although they are unreal. I

therefore meditate upon Him, Lord Sri Krishna, who is eternally existent in the transcendental abode, which is forever free from the illusory representations of the material world. I meditate upon Him, for He is the Absolute Truth."

Thus Srimad-Bhagavatam is the key to unlock the secrets of the Vedanta Sutras. There is no literature in the world as great as this Srimad Bhagavata Purana. The transcendental narrations within it give us light in this dark age of Kali yuga:

krishne sva-dhamopagate
dharma-jnanadibhih saha
kalau nashta-drisham esha
puranarko 'dhunoditah

"This Bhagavata Purana is as brilliant as the sun, and it has arisen just after the departure of Lord Krishna to His own abode, accompanied by religion, knowledge, etc. Persons who have lost their vision due to the dense darkness of ignorance in the age of Kali shall get light from this Purana"

